DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 675 EA 026 438

AUTHOR Pounder, Diana G.
TITLE Evaluating Theory-Practice Linkages in Administrator Preparation.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration (Philadelphia, PA, October 28-30, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Doctoral Degrees; *Doctoral Programs; *Educational Administration; *Field Experience Programs; *Graduate Study; Higher Education; Internship Programs; *Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that evaluated the effectiveness of a field-based doctoral program in educational administration. The Ed.D. program at the University of Utah attempted to link theory and research to the practice of improvement. Specifically, the study examined the degree and ways in which student field-based projects and coursework resulted in program or policy changes in schools or other education-related agencies. Data were obtained from a survey of 18 Ed.D. students in the first two cohorts and from an analysis of students' field-applications projects and dissertations. Findings suggest that approximately one-half to two-thirds of the projects resulted in some sort of policy or program change in educational practice. The changes took the form of either policy adoptions that addressed legal and/or personnel administrative concerns or instructional program implementations. Factors that enhanced the likelihood of a project resulting in a policy or program change were: (1) the student's familiarity with relevant problems of practice; (2) the degree to which students worked closely with other organizational employees in developing and refining the project; and (3) the utility and conceptual/analytical quality of the proposal itself. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 378 675

EVALUATING THEORY-PRACTICE LINKAGES IN ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION

Diana G. Pounder

Associate Professor

Department of Educational Administration

University of Utah

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

A paper presented to the 1994 University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Conference, Philadelphia, PA.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Pounder

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 026 438

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of a field-based doctoral program in educational administration in linking theory and research to the improvement of practice. Specifically, the study evaluates the degree and ways in which doctoral student field-based projects and studies completed as an integral part of the University of Utah's field-based Ed.D. program have resulted in program or policy changes in schools or other education-related agencies.

This evaluation of the theory-practice emphasis in the University of Utah's Ed.D. program suggests that the program is successfully meeting its central program objective. Study data indicate that approximately half to two-thirds of student projects resulted in some sort of policy or program change in educational practice. Projects that resulted in change in local schools, districts, or other education-related agencies tended to be either policy adoptions addressing legal and/or personnel administration concerns or instructional program implementations for students and staff. Factors that enhanced the liklihood of a project resulting in a policy or program change were: 1) the student's familiarity with relevant problems of practice; 2) the degree to which students worked closely with other organizational employees in developing and refining the project, and 3) the utility and conceptual/analytical quality of the proposal itself.

EVALUATING THEORY-PRACTICE LINKAGES IN ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of a field-based doctoral program in educational administration in linking theory and research to the improvement of practice. Specifically, the study reported will evaluate the degree and ways in which doctoral student field-based projects and studies completed as an integral part of the University of Utah's field-based Ed.D. program have resulted in program or policy changes in schools or other education-related agencies.

In 1991, the University of Utah's Department of Educational Administration implemented a field-based doctoral program for the advanced preparation of practicing administrators. The program was designed to more effectively link the theory and research emphasis found in the university with the improvement of practice in schools or other education-related agencies (See Ogawa & Pounder, 1993; Pounder, 1993). The program pairs traditional doctoral academic seminars that have a theory/research emphasis with a series of corresponding "Field Applications" courses. These field applications courses require students to complete projects applying their theory/research study to problems of practice. Also, students' culminating dissertation work or "clinical research study" is designed with a similar emphasis. To aid in establishing this theory-practice linkage, practicing administrators from the field work as part-time clinical faculty to team-teach the field applications courses with resident faculty. Also, students' employing agencies are encouraged to cooperate with students to identify projects that would have relevance to current problems in their own educational organization or within the state. The department's intention is that these field applications projects would not only provide a valuable learning experience for students, but that their employing organizations might benefit from specific studies informing their own problems of educational practice.

Since the inception of the Ed.D. program, several elements of the field-based program have been evaluated, including its structure, staffing, and instructional and student evaluation processes (see, for example, Hart & Naylor,

1992; Newell & Sperry, 1992; Ogawa & Galvin, 1992; Pounder, 1994). Some minor alterations in the original program structure and staffing arrangement were made after the first two years of implementation. Specifically, the program was changed from a three-year to a four-year schedule, with theory and corresponding field application courses offered in sequence rather than concurrently. Also, clinical faculty assignments were changed to simplify teaching and advisement coordination efforts. The final program structure and staffing arrangements went into effect during the 1993-94 academic year.

Because the first cohort of Ed.D. students have recently completed their dissertation work, it is appropriate to assess the effectiveness of the program's theory-practice linkages by evaluating the degree and ways in which Ed.D. student field-based projects and clinical research studies have resulted in program or policy changes in educational practice.

Context for Ed.D. Program Revision

Prior to revising its Ed.D. program, the University of Utah's Department of Educational Administration's offerings were quite conventional. The department offered a Master's program, an administrator certification program and two doctoral programs: a Ph.D. program and an Ed.D. program.

The Ed.D. program, while ostensibly providing advanced preparation for practicing administrators, differed little from the Ph.D. program, conforming closely to the arts and science model of graduate education. The vast majority of doctoral students in educational administration --most of whom intended to pursue careers as practitioners--opted for the Ph.D. program.

Several major forces influenced the redesign of the Ed.D. program. First, the department sought to draw a clearer distinction between the department's Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs, and, in particular, to design a doctoral program that more effectively served the needs of practicing administrators. Second, the department's requirement that full-time doctoral students in residency work no more than half-time was particularly difficult for practicing administrators who wanted to stay on their career track or who had difficulty getting a full year leave of absence. Lastly, groups like the National Policy Board on Educational

Administration and others had begun to establish a climate for reform in educational administration programs ---- with many of these reform efforts emphasizing the need for greater linkages between academic knowledge and reflective practice gleaned from the school setting.

In addition to these considerations, the department was conscious of some internal parameters for change. Foremost, the program had to be designed with the assumption that few, if any, additional resources could be allocated to the Ed.D. program. Thus, it was decided that the department's existing theory/research doctoral seminars would be included in the Ed.D. program. Further, based on the department's 10 year success with cohorts in the Masters program, Ed.D. students would be admitted and enrolled in cohorts to increase efficiency and predictability of course offerings.

Ed.D. Program Description

The program elements described below (structure, staffing, and student evaluation practices) were designed to enhance the linkages between theory and research traditionally emphasized at the university and reflective practice in the field.

Structural Elements

The Ed.D. program utilizes a field-based approach to the preparation of career administrators by incorporating the following structural elements. (See Figure I.) The preparation program is systematic and sequential in design. In particular, the program utilizes a cohort organization scheme in which core requirements in the areas of leadership, organizations, and ethics are scheduled the first academic year of the program, followed by elective specializations during the subsequent years of study. Elective options include courses in instructional management, legal issues, finance, politics and policy analysis, human resource administration, and some parallel courses with an emphasis on administration in higher education institutions. The final year is devoted to the completion of an independent research project, the clinical research study, which is the Ed.D. counterpart to the traditional Ph.D. doctoral dissertation.

All content areas, including core requirements and specialization

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

electives, include a theory/research seminar paired with a field-based application course. Students use their respective employment settings as a "field laboratory" to do applied projects and problem-solving. (Ph.D. students are eligible for enrollment in all theory/research seminars, but field-applications courses are limited to Ed.D. students only.) The field application course projects in the core areas of leadership and organizations are often analysis exercises assigned by the faculty. However, the field application projects in the specialization areas are typically left to the student's discretion (with faculty approval) and are intended to provide opportunities for students to address a problem of practice relevant to their own organizational or professional setting.

The research components of the doctoral program are scheduled during the summer sessions of the program, with the first summer devoted to Principles of Inquiry --- a conceptual approach to administrative decision-making and problem-solving. The second summer emphasizes methods and techniques of research, and the last summer involves the completion of the proposal for the culminating clinical research study.

The clinical research study is analogous to the traditional doctoral dissertation but with greater emphasis on a specific problem of practice. For instance, students may choose to evaluate an educational or administrative program that has been implemented in his or her employment setting. The clinical research study would be informed by previous theory and research and have defensible methods, but may have a more normative tone in its recommendations for practice. Further, it is not expected that a clinical research study have the degree of generalizability or the theory-building or theory-testing characteristics typically expected in a traditional doctoral dissertation. The department intends that student projects and clinical research studies may benefit not only the students but also their employing educational institutions by addressing relevant and timely administrative problems.

Clinical Faculty

The Ed.D. program utilizes a different staffing configuration than does the

Ph.D. program. Because the Ed.D. has such a strong emphasis on administrative problem-solving and application of theory and research to practice, the department employs practicing field administrators who hold a doctoral degree as part-time clinical faculty (.10 FTE). Most of these clinical faculty work as line administrators for local school district central offices, the State Office of Education, or higher education institutions. Originally, clinical faculty were assigned to work with Ed.D. students in a ratio of one faculty to two or three students across all field application coursework. However, revisions in staffing assignments were made based on earlier program evaluation findings. Now, one or two clinical faculty are assigned to each field application content area. This new staffing configuration makes instructional and advisement coordination efforts between clinical faculty and resident faculty less cumbersome; allows clinical faculty to concentrate on one particular content area most related to their professional experience and interests; and allows students an opportunity to work with an array of clinical faculty during their program of study.

The role of clinical faculty in the program might best be described as advisory to the academic faculty. Although resident faculty have full responsibility for their theory/research seminars, clinical faculty members work as equal team members with resident faculty included in the planning and teaching field applications courses. Clinical faculty are expected to advise students on the development of their field projects as well as to evaluate these field projects. Clinical faculty may also help students gain access to relevant information needed for their projects if they are unable to garner that sort of cooperation from their employing organization. Clinical faculty may also serve on students' doctoral committees, although on-campus faculty must constitute the majority of the supervising committee.

Student Evaluation

Admission requirements and standards for the Ed.D. program are the same as for the Ph.D. program (GRE scores, past academic record, letters of recommendation, personal statement) with one important exception. All Ed.D.

applicants must be practicing administrators who have the full cooperation and support of their employer. This requirement is to ensure that all students have a "field laboratory" in which to do applied projects and to assure that their employers will work cooperatively with the student to meet the administrative problem-solving requirements of the program. Students are admitted in cohort groups on an alternate year basis.

Another important difference in student evaluation is the departure from the traditional comprehensive qualifying exam used to promote students to doctoral candidacy. Instead, a portfolio review of Ed.D. student work is held annually. A traditional proposal defense and a final oral defense of the clinical research study are the culminating student evaluation components of the program.

Methods

Data sources for this study included student field applications projects (completed in several field application courses) and culminating clinical research study (dissertation) documents as well as Ed.D. students' responses to open-ended survey questions. Data were collected from Ed.D. students in the first two cohorts because they have completed from four to six field projects each. Four students in the first cohort also have completed and defended their clinical research studies. The third cohort of students was not included because they have completed only one field project at this point in their program. Documents and survey data were analyzed by the researcher with auditing by a small team of department faculty and graduate assistants.

Research questions addressed included:

1) What proportion of student projects completed in the Ed.D. program resulted in a program or policy change in a school district or other education-related organization?

2) How would one characterize the student project work that resulted in a program or policy change?

3) How were project ideas generated?

4) To what degree and how did employing organizations influence the development of student projects?

5) What factors facilitated a policy adoption or program implementation related to the student project work?

Findings

Thirteen of the 18 Ed.D. students responded to the mailed survey. Like most students in the Ed.D. program, respondents were largely middle management level educational administrators at a mid-career stage. Those who responded included two public school vice-principals, five public school principals, two school district directors of special education, two directors of state office of education divisions, an assistant administrative officer to a university Vice-President. (Non-respondents include a public school vice-principal, two public school principals, a director of a public educational program for incarcerated youth, and a community college department chair.)

All Ed.D. students completed four to six field application projects each; most students were enrolled in a total of six field application courses but three students substituted other coursework for one or two of the field application courses. Also, four students had successfully completed a culminating clinical research study (dissertation) at the time these data were collected. Of the field application projects completed, projects in the two core areas of leadership and organizations were analysis exercises assigned by the instructor and were not designed to result in implementation. Thus, although students were enrolled in four to six field application courses each, two of these field course projects did not allow students the discretion to develop independent projects that might address problems of practice in their own organizational or professional settings.

A total of 33 projects (or clinical studies) completed by the 13 respondents resulted in a program or policy change. The 33 adopted projects represent approximately 43% of total projects completed (76) by these students, and represent approximately 67% of project assignments that could reasonably lend themselves to adoption or implementation (49). Since most students had three or four project proposals adopted (range= 1 - 5), students were reasonably to highly successful in developing projects that were implemented or adopted in practice. Students with somewhat less success in project adoption were assistants to their school or organizational unit head rather than serving as a school or unit head

themselves.

Review of the content of project documents revealed that approximately 60% of implemented or adopted projects were policy analysis/recommendation papers. The remaining 40% of projects were proposals for a program implementation. More than two-thirds of implemented or adopted projects had been developed in the human resource administration (8), law (6), or instructional management field courses (8).

Policy recommendation projects addressed mostly legal and/or personnel policy issues. For instance, adopted policy recommendations included an AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency) policy for students and staff; several policies outlining hiring practices for teachers, certified employees, and classified employees, including prevention of negligent hiring; several policies on teacher supervision, evaluation, and remediation; a sexual harassment policy; and a reduction-in-force policy. These policy proposals were adopted largely at the school district or organizational level, even when the student worked at the school or division level.

Program development projects were largely proposals for instructional programs such as a magnet school program for ESL (English as a Second Language) students; an instructional program for disadvantaged elementary students; a new ethics course/curriculum for university undergraduate students; several staff development programs in specific curricular areas; and a program of recruitment and retention of diverse students and faculty in a university. The program proposals were implemented largely at the individual school or division level rather than at the district or organizational level.

The overwhelming majority of project topics were generated by the students to address a problem of practice they experienced in their immediate or broader work environment. Repeatedly, students indicated they "saw a need" to improve a problem situation. In a couple of instances, students approached their school superintendent or central administrator for suggestions about a project topic. In these cases, the superintendents recommended development of a district policy in a neglected area. Two or three students indicated that the course

professor(s) provided suggestions for project topics. However, the clear majority of project topics were initiated due to the student's familiarity with administrative problems in their organizational or professional arena.

All but one of the students found their employing organizational personnel to be highly supportive and cooperative in facilitating the adoption of their project proposals. In particular, they explained that supervisors, peers, and subordinate employees provided repeated feedback on the proposal during its development. Organizational personnel also provided information and access to relevant data to improve the project quality and relevance to the organization. Of course, for others to provide input to the project development, the students had to seek out and be receptive to the suggestions of others. Clearly, students tended to be highly participative in their approach to project development. One student indicated that his/her supervisor was cooperative, "but not initially happy with [project] suggestions and they were modified". This same student functions in an administrative support role, with little independent discretionary authority.

Students felt that the primary reason their projects were adopted into practice was that their proposal met an important organizational or administrative need. Students also recognized that support and endorsement by key decision-makers --- school board members, chief executive officers, union leaders, and faculty or staff committees --- facilitated the adoption of the proposal. Because these same individuals or groups had been consulted during the project development, their support was more likely attained. Few of these projects, if any, could have been adopted into practice based solely on the authority of the student/administrator him-or herself. Students also acknowledged that the degree and ease of adoption support they garnered was often influenced by the strength of their project's supporting theoretical and/or research rationale. Students' knowledge of supporting literature and methods to frame a proposal argument may have enhanced their power to have projects adopted into practice. As one student summarized, the factors that facilitated adoption of my projects were:

"1) the timely/critical nature of the topic;

2) my interactions with school or district personnel regarding the topic...district knowledge of projects on which I was working;

3) the rigorous nature of the projects...high expectations from myself, district, and University...resulting in quality projects."

Summary and Discussion

This evaluation of the theory-practice emphasis in the University of Utah's Ed.D. program suggests that the program is successfully meeting its central program objective. Study data indicate that approximately half to two-thirds of student projects resulted in some sort of policy or program change in educational practice. Projects that resulted in change in local schools, districts, or other education-related agencies tended to be either policy adoptions addressing legal and/or personnel administration concerns or instructional program implementations for students and staff. Factors that enhanced the liklihood of a project resulting in a policy or program change were: 1) the student's familiarity with relevant problems of practice; 2) the degree to which students worked closely with other organizational employees in developing and refining the project, and 3) the utility and conceptual/analytical quality of the proposal itself.

There are several questions still unanswered by the study data. For instance, did regular and clinical faculty have so little influence on the field project ideas and development? There was very little mention by students of the influence of faculty in the field project activity. Perhaps students take the faculty instructional role for granted, or perhaps when it comes to addressing problems of practice in a particular field setting, students do not see faculty as a particularly important resource. Likewise, students made no mention of any influence by their peers in the cohort program, in spite of the researcher's observation that students frequently interact informally about problems in their administrative practice. Also, to what degree will these students carry this demonstrated theory-to-practice skill with them over their administrative careers? The long-term effects of the program's theory-practice emphasis are unknown. Also unknown is the degree to which students' employing organizations feel the benefit of their cooperation in students' field activities. Because the

number of program or policy adoptions in any given organization are few due to the small number of Ed.D. students employed in any single organization, employing school districts or educational agencies may not feel the full impact of the Ed.D. students' successful efforts. By contrast, the Educational Administration Department feels it has enhanced its connections with the local field of practice due to its association with clinical faculty and the field application work of Ed.D. students serving as practicing administrators in Utah.

The approach used to evaluate the success of the program's theory-practice linkages in this study was an evaluation of student products. Clearly, this is not the only evaluation approach that might have been used. Other evaluation efforts might yield different results. The study results are further limited by the small sample size utilized as well as by the short time-frame for evaluation. The broader long-term effectiveness of the program's theory-practice emphasis remains uncertain. However, the results of this study suggest that the Ed.D. program has successfully addressed its objective to improve the connection between the department's theory/research emphasis and administrative practice.

References

Hart, A.W. & Naylor, K. (1992). *A meeting of the minds, so to speak: The organizational socialization of clinical faculty.* Paper presented at the 1992 American Educational Research Association Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Newell, L.J. & Sperry, D.J. (1992). *A house built on rock or sand? Value, ethical and legal issues raised by Utah's field-based Ed.D. program.* Paper presented at the 1992 American Educational Research Association Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Ogawa, R.T. & Galvin, P. (1992). *Improving judgment calls: Using a normative model of human inference in the advanced preparation of educational administrators.* Paper presented at the 1992 American Educational Research Association Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Ogawa, R.T. & Pounder, D.G. (1993). Structured Improvisation: The University of Utah's Ed.D. Program in Educational Administration. A chapter in J. Murphy (Ed.) *Preparing Tomorrow's School Leaders: Alternative Designs.* University Park, PA: UCEA.

Pounder, D.G. (1993). Field-Based Doctoral Program. In *Design for Leadership*: The Bulletin of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

Pounder, D.G. (1994). Work incentives to attract clinical faculty. *People & Education: The Human Side of Schools*, 2 (1), 14-36.

Year 1 — ACADEMIC CORE

Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Principles of Rsch & Inq (3) Rsch Prerq (0-6)	Leadership Sem. (3) Ethics Sem.--------	Organizations Sem. (3) Ethics Sem. (4)	Int. Field Apps (6)

Year 2 — ACADEMIC SPECIALIZATIONS

Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Spec. Sem 1* (3) Rsch Meth & Tech (4) PORTFOLIO REVIEW #1	Field Apps Sp.1 (3)	Spec. Sem. 2* (3)	Field Apps Sp.2 (3)

Year 3 — ACADEMIC SPECIALIZATIONS

Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Spec. Sem. 3* (3) PORTFOLIO REVIEW #2	Field Apps Sp.3 (3) Proposal Dev.------	Spec. Sem. 4* (3) Proposal Dev.-----	Field Apps Sp.4 (3) Proposal Dev. (3)

Year 4 — FIELD RESEARCH (Residency Period)

Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
PORTFOLIO REVIEW #3 PROPOSAL APPROVAL Faculty Consultation Ed. Ad. 799 (3)	Field Res. Sem. (2) Clin. Res. St. (7)	Field Res. Sem. (2) Clin. Res. St. (7)	Field Res. Sem. (2) Clin. Res. St. (7) FINAL DEFENSE

Figure I. University of Utah Ed.D. Program in Educational Administration

* Specializations include: Instructional Management, Economics of Ed., Law, Human Resource Mgt., Politics & Policy Analysis, and related Higher Ed. courses. Courses in Group Dynamics, Educational Technology, or other relevant areas of study may be substituted for specialization courses with committee approval.